

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAMAKO 0672

AFDROUGHT

E O 11652 GDS

SUBJ: GOM RESPONSE TO PRESS CRITICISM OF DROUGHT POLICIES

1. AFTER A SIX-WEEK SILENCE, THE GOM CHOSE THE CILSS CONFERENCE IN BAMAKO TO RESPOND PUBLICLY TO A SERIES OF ARTICLES IN LE MONDE, OF JAN 6-7 AND PARTICULARLY FEB 6, BY FRENCH JOURNALIST PHILIPPE DECRAENE, CRITICAL OF MALI'S HANDLING OF THE DROUGHT, AND ESPECIALLY OF ITS TREATMENT OF THE TOUAREGS.

2. IN HIS OPENING STATEMENT TO THE CONFERENCE, MALI PRESIDENT MOUSSA TRAORE REFERRED TO "A CERTAIN PRESS" WHICH CLAIMED THAT GOM LEARNED OF THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE DROUGHT FROM OUTSIDE, THAT IT REMAINED INDIFFERENT UNTIL FORCED TO ACT BY THE PRESSURE OF INTERNATIONAL OPINION, AND THAT IT WAS TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE SITUATION TO PRACTICE GENOCIDE AND FIND A FINAL SOLUTION TO "I DON'T KNOW WHICH VAGUE ANCESTRAL QUARREL BETWEEN NOMADS AND SEDENTARY FARMERS." THESE ALLEGATIONS, HE SAID, WERE CRIMINAL LIES.

3. PRINCIPLE RESPONSE HOWEVER CAME IN A PRESS CONFERENCE BY
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MINISTER OF PRODUCTION SIDI COULIBALY IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE

CONCLUSION OF THE CILSS MEETING, WHICH ALL CHIEFS OF MISSION IN BAMAKO, INCLUDING INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, AND REPRESENTATIVES TO CILSS WERE INVITED TO ATTEND, AND MOST DID.

4. COULIBALY BEGAN HIS PREPARED STATEMENT BY DEPLORING THE "INSIDIOUS PRESS CAMPAIGN" TO DISCREDIT MALI'S EFFORTS TO COMBAT THE DROUGHT AND DISCOURAGE MEN OF GOODWILL WHO, WORLD-WIDE, HAD AIDED THE SUFFERERS OF THE SAHEL. WHILE "YESTERDAY" OTHER COUNTRIES HAD SUFFERED SIMILAR ATTACKS, TODAY THE GOVT OF MALI WAS UNDER ATTACK, TOMORROW IT WILL DOUBTLESS BE YOU (THE ASSEMBLED GROUP). SINCE ALL THE COUNTRIES OF THE SAHEL WERE LINKED IN MISFORTUNE, REPORTS ABOUT MALI AFFECT ALL THE OTHERS.

5. ALTHOUGH (OR PERHAPS BECAUSE) THE FEB 6 ISSUE OF LE MONDE HAD BEEN CONFISCATED IN MALI AND HENCE NOT READ BY THE PUBLIC, COULIBALY THEN REFERRED SPECIFICALLY TO LE MONDE, CITING DECRAENE BY NAME, AND QUOTED ACCURATELY AND AT LENGTH FROM THE FEB 6 ARTICLE.

6. COULIBALY THEN PROCEEDED TO REFUTE DECRAENE'S CHARGES POINT BY POINT:

(A) IN RESPONSE TO THE CHARGE THAT GOM WAS NOT AWARE OF SITUATION, HE SAID THE RAINS OF THE LAST TWO WEEKS IN SEPT ARE DETERMINING FOR THE HARVEST, AND, IN 1972, AS SOON AS IT APPEARED THAT THE HARVEST WOULD FAIL, THE GOM ASKED FOR HELP FROM THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY. ITS FIRST APPEAL WAS MET WITH INCREDULITY; BUT IT WAS AFTER THIS APPEAL THAT INTERNATIONAL OPINION WAS ALERTED.

B) TO THE ALLEGATION OF INDIFFERENCE, HE ASSERTED THAT THE PRESIDENT AND VARIOUS MINISTERS, INCLUDING HIMSELF, HAD COVERED THOUSANDS OF MILES IN THE SAHEL TO INFORM THEMSELVES, AND HE WAS SURPRISED THAT A VISITING JOURNALIST OR A FUNCTIONARY IN BAMAKO WOULD CLAIM TO BE BETTER INFORMED THAN THE GOVT.

C) WITH RESPECT TO THE CHARGE OF CENSORSHIP, HE SAID THE NATIONAL RADIO HAD ORGANIZED A SERIES OF INTERVIEWS ON THE DROUGHT, "WITH NO CENSORSHIP", AS MILLIONS OF LISTENERS COULD ATTEST.

D) TO DECRAENE'S ALLEGATION THAT GOM HAD PLACED OBSTACLES IN THE WAY OF THOSE WISHING TO OBSERVE DROUGHT CONDITIONS, HE REPLIED THAT GOM HAS ACCORDED THE GREATEST POSSIBLE FACILITIES TO ALL OF THE MISSIONS OF EXPERTS WHO HAVE COME TO INFORM THEMSELVES OF THE CALAMITY, WITHIN THE LIMITS OF ITS RESOURCES. FURTHER, IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT THOSE WHO PROVIDE ASSISTANCE HAVE THE MEANS
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TO CONTROL THE UTILISATION OF THIS AID. "SINCE THE INTERESTED PARTIES ARE PRESENT, I WOULD LIKE TO HEAR ALOUD WHAT OBSTACLE HAS BEEN PLACED BEFORE THEM IN THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THEIR MISSION."

7. COULIBALY THEN SAID THAT THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM LIES WITH THOSE WHO ARE NOSTALGIC FOR THE RECENT PAST (PRE-INDEPENDENCE) AND CERTAIN OF M. DECRAENE'S INFORMANTS WERE DOUBTLESS OF THAT ILK. MALI ASKS OF THOSE WHO REALLY WISH TO HELP TO RESPECT ITS STRUCTURE, ITS

INSTITUTIONS, AND ITS PROCEDURES. THE MISERY OF OTHERS IS NOT A TOURIST SPECTACLE. DIGNITY IS A WORD THE FULL MEANING OF WHICH TO THE MAN OF THE SAHEL IS PERHAPS DIFFICULT FOR SOME TO UNDERSTAND. IT IS THE LAST POSSESSION OF THE POOR. IT MUST BE PRESERVED AT ALL COSTS.

8. IN RESPONSE TO THE CHARGE OF GENOCIDE, COULIBALY REFERRED TO THE EVENTS OF 1963, WHEN "A HANDFUL OF ADVENTURERS", NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH THE TOUAREGS IN GENERAL, TRIED TO CREATE AN INDEPENDENT SATURAN STATE (ORGANISATION COMMUNE DES REGIONS SAHARIENNES), AND COMPARED THIS ATTEMPT TO KATANGA AND BIAFRA. BUT, HE SAID, THERE ARE NO TRIBAL QUARRELS IN MALI, AND EVERY MALIAN IS PROFOUNDLY ATTACHED TO THE NATION. REFERRING TO REFUGEES OUTSIDE OF MALI, HE SAID THERE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN SUCH, "SINCE WE HAVE A TASTE FOR TRAVEL" AND THE NOMADS SEEK PASTURES AND WATER WITHOUT REGARD TO THE ARTIFICIAL BORDERS OF COLONISATION.

9. COULIBALY THEN ANSWERED A SERIES OF BLAND QUESTIONS THAT HAD BEEN SUBMITTED TWO DAYS IN ADVANCE.

10. COMMENT: SINCE DECRAENE'S ARTICLE HAD BEEN EFFECTIVELY SUPPRESSED IN MALI, EMBASSY SOMEWHAT SURPRISED THAT COULIBALY QUOTED FROM IT SO EXTENSIVELY. MOST PROBABLY, HOWEVER, GOM FELT THAT IN THE PRESENCE OF SO MANY DONOR REPS, THE CHARGES COULD NOT BE IGNORED, AND HENCE CHOSE TO MAKE A VIRTUE OF NECESSITY. COULIBALY IS AN ENGAGING AND ARTICULATE SPEAKER. HE HAS LITTLE RESPONSIBILITY FOR DROUGHT ACTIVITIES BUT HE IS A CIVILIAN, AND NOT A MEMBER OF CMLN, WHICH LIKELY EXPLAINS HIS BEING CHOSEN TO PRESENT THE DEFENSE. FRENCH AND GERMAN AMBASSADORS AND UNREP SCHELLENBERG CONSIDERED COULIBALY'S STATEMENT TO BE AN EFFECTIVE REBUTTAL OF DECRAENE'S CHARGE, A VIEW SHARED BY THE EMBASSY. WE WONDER, HOWEVER, A) WHETHER GENERAL PUBLIC IN MALI HAS UNTIL NOW FULLY REALIZED THE EXTENT OF THE DROUGHT IN THE VI REGION, CONFIDENTIAL

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C) WHETHER THE PUBLIC WILL--IN THE LIGHT OF DECRAENE'S NOW EXPOSED CHARGES OF CENSORSHIP--BEGIN TO QUESTION THE ACCURACY OF THE PRESS AND RADIO, AND C) WHETHER--IN VIEW OF COULIBALY'S COMMENT THAT "MALI IS UNDERDEVELOPED AND CONSEQUENTLY UNDER-ADMINISTERED"--MALIAN PUBLIC OPINION WILL BEGIN TO QUESTION GOM ADMINISTRATION. IN OUR VIEW, GIVEN LOW LITERACY RATE AND GENERAL POLITICAL APATHY OF MALIAN POPULACE, ANSWER TO ALL THREE IS PROBABLY NOT.

11. FULL TEXT OF COULIBALY'S STATEMENT BEING POUCHED.
MCGUIRE

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